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The Jacobs Report

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, October 3, 2003

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BIGOTRY DRIVES EFFORT TO “PROTECT” MARRIAGE

An effort to amend the Constitution to ensure that marriage contracts are only between one man and one woman in Michigan officially commenced yesterday with “bipartisan” support—and vehement and loud opposition.

16 of the 17 co-sponsors are Republicans (Dennis Olshove of Warren was the only Democrat to sign onto the legislation), but the State Republican Party is putting up the caution flag on the “Marriage Protection” constitutional amendment that Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) introduced Thursday, which would ask voters in November 2004 if the definition of marriage should be written into the state Constitution.

State GOP Executive Director Greg McNeilly said the state party wants to review the argument that a constitutional amendment is really needed since federal and state law clearly state marriage is between a man and a woman. “Constitutional amendments are not good places to make bumper sticker statements,” McNeilly said.

Cropsey said the Constitutional amendment is needed to protect Michigan from activist liberal judges who could work around the state law to validate civil unions granted to gays and lesbians in Canada and other states.

“Voters will be able to decide what's best for their children, their families and their communities,” Cropsey said. “This is a pro-marriage and pro-family amendment.” Ironically, his legislation strips rights from communities that have already decided to grant legal status to homosexual couples. Same-sex civil union benefits given by the city of Ann Arbor and a handful of other Michigan cities, would be erased.

Jake Kaplan, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), grabbed onto this fact in asking some pointed questions to Cropsey during yesterday's press conference. Cropsey was either unwilling or unable to answer Mr. Kaplan's questions.

In order to get ballot placement, Cropsey needs 26 senators and 74 House members to vote yes. He may fall short of his first hurdle, the Senate. Cropsey said two weeks ago that he had the votes, but that may be wishful thinking on his part. Five Republicans and fifteen Democrats have not put their names on the document.

The mood of yesterday's press conference was tense. The American Family Association of Michigan distributed incendiary bumper stickers reading, “REAL MEN marry women. Say YES to marriage” and a

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heated argument between a member of the Triangle Foundation and a Christian pastor was broken up by a Senate Sergeant at Arms.

Triette Reeves (D-Detroit) was the only Democrat present at the press conference. In the past, Reeves has cited religious motivation for voting to loosen gun restrictions and circulating e-mail prayers to legislative employees. Again, Reverend Reeves said her decision to support the proposed amendment was based on her “belief in God and his definition of marriage.”

Reeves said it is not her attempt to be antagonistic or force marriage on everybody, only that she is supporting and promoting a God-ordained institution.

Obviously, Rep. Chris Kolb (D-Ann Arbor), the state’s only openly gay legislator, didn’t agree. “This has nothing to do with governing the state or protecting marriage,” Kolb said. “It has everything to do with openly discriminating against gay and lesbian citizens of Michigan who are being vilified for who they love.”

“This isn’t about God,” added Senator Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods). “And it’s not really about protecting families—it’s about discriminating against certain groups of citizens. To close the door on future recognition for our gay and lesbian families is wrong. These families already exist, and they are required to pay taxes and abide by the law of the land just like anyone else. To deny them traditional rights is not the way to “save” marriage. Besides, federal and state law clearly state marriage is between a man and a woman. So, what is the point of this legislation? Why is the Legislature wasting time and resources that could be much better applied?”

A.G. RULES CHARTER SCHOOLS LAW, THOMPSON TAKES A WALK

Fifteen charter high schools in Detroit are already allowed under a new law because of an obscure legislative technicality, ruled Attorney General Mike Cox.

Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm and leaders of the Republican-led Legislature came to an agreement two weeks ago on a wide-ranging deal that would have expanded the number of charter schools (including the 15 high schools in Detroit sought by philanthropist Bob Thompson), added new regulations for charter schools and restored an elected school board for Detroit. That deal has since fallen apart.

But before they agreed to place that deal into SB 393, Republicans already had sent to her desk the original version, which simply authorized the 15 charter high schools. Under the constitution, a governor has 14 days from the time the Legislature formally sends the bill to him/her to sign, veto or let the Legislature recall it. If none of those scenarios occur while the Legislature is in session, the bill becomes law.

The Senate recalled the bill within the 14-day window as a deal neared, but the House did so on the 15th day.

Rep. Jim Howell (R-St. Charles), chair of the House Judiciary Committee, asked Mr. Cox to rule on whether the House’s belated action means the bill has become law.

As if this development wasn’t stunning enough on its own, Detroit-area philanthropist Bob Thompson then issued a statement, effectively removing from the table his \$200 million gift to establish new Detroit charters. “I am disappointed and saddened by the anger and hostility that has greeted our proposal,”

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Thompson said. "The proposal was meant to be for kids and not against anyone or any institution. The ruling by the Attorney General today undoubtedly will increase the angst among some. This response has been very distressing to all of us involved in the project with the Thompson Foundation. It has taken a personal toll on my wife and me."

To the announcement from Mr. Thompson, Governor Jennifer Granholm said, "Bob Thompson is one of the kindest and most generous persons I know, and I regret some have misconstrued his noble intentions."

Ms. Granholm had come to support Mr. Thompson's plan to open new charter schools, though not necessarily all in Detroit. The controversy over SB 393 was largely in part because Ms. Granholm did not want to veto the measure with it just involving Mr. Thompson's proposed schools. She had said a charter school proposal had to deal with all the elements of a charter agreement.

Republicans immediately blamed Ms. Granholm for the decision by Mr. Thompson. Between Mr. Thompson's withdrawal of his proposal and Mr. Cox's ruling, relations between the first-year Democratic governor and the Republican-controlled Legislature-especially the Senate-appear to have reached their roughest point.

A spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) blamed the "bungling" between the governor and Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick for the decision.

Interviewed on a Detroit television station, Mr. Sikkema put more blame on Mr. Kilpatrick and said Mr. Thompson did not lose on Thursday, but that the children of Detroit did.

State Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Franklin, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Families & Human Services Committee and the Economic Development, Small Business & Regulatory Reform Committee. She also serves on the Government Operations and Health Policy Committees.

Constituents of the 14th District may contact Senator Jacobs at sengjacobs@senate.michigan.gov or toll-free at 1-888-937-4453.

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